

Thorncreek Road To Moscow:

Project Number: DHP-NH-4110(156)

Key Number: 9294



Community Interviews – Summary

Report to

Idaho Transportation Department

District 2

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District Engineer

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**ITD District 2
Thorncreek Road to Moscow
Community Interviews
Summary**

The Idaho Transportation Department District 2 plans to widen 21 miles of U.S. Highway 95 between the Top of Lewiston Hill and Moscow. The first 17 miles of the project (Top of Lewiston Hill to Thorncreek Road) may be under construction beginning as early as this fall. However, the new alignment on the 6.5 miles of U.S. 95 between Thorncreek Road and Moscow was challenged in a court of law, requiring ITD to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement. ITD is now in the early stages of this project and is developing a public involvement plan.

During July and early August, Gwen Smith, ITD public involvement coordinator, and Rosemary Curtin, a public involvement consultant hired by ITD, conducted interviews in the Moscow area with community members. The purpose was to learn how to engage the community in the Thorncreek Road to Moscow Project and help the team develop a public involvement plan.

Public involvement is important to ITD and to an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). An EIS is the highest level of environmental review, and requires ITD begin with a “clean slate,” on this portion of the project. Environmental studies will be completed and a range of alignments will be evaluated.

The interviewees were chosen after reviewing project files (the original project was split into two – Top of Lewiston Hill to Genesee and Genesee to Moscow), discussing names with ITD and asking other community members. A range of people with different views and opinions about these projects were interviewed.

People who participated in these interviews included: elected officials, government agencies, citizens, business owners, environmental groups and property owners affected by previous alignments. The same questions were asked in every interview:

- What was your previous involvement with the Top of Lewiston Hill to Genesee and Genesee to Moscow project?
- How did you get information about this project?
- What went well with the Idaho Transportation Department’s previous public involvement efforts? What did not go so well?
- What would you like to see in our future public involvement efforts? How do you want to be involved in this project? What is the best way to communicate with you and/or notify you of any upcoming activity?
- What are the most important issues you would like ITD to consider in this process?
- Is there anyone else you think we should speak with?

The following summary presents a general overview of the documented comments from the interviews and represents the main themes and opinions expressed by the public. Interviewees were given an opportunity to distribute the interview questions to other people and this summary includes their responses as well.

- Most interviewees attended public meetings and/or focus groups and read the newspaper to get information about the project. Most were involved either because they were directly affected by the proposed alignments or they work with the city. A handful were involved because they are members of an environmental group.
- A majority of people received information about this project through the newspaper or other media. Most mentioned gaining information from mass mailings, others reported getting information from ITD itself.
- Most felt ITD succeeded by informing the majority of the community about the project and allowing them to give input.
- Several interviewees felt the deck was stacked, and the department had already made up its mind before involving the community. Interviewees felt as if the department was selective with citizens who were included in the original project focus group and what information was released to the public.
- For future public involvement efforts, the majority indicated a need for a higher level of public involvement and a heavy saturation of information. Most seemed adamant about having the entire community involved to make the process fair. Interviewees requested that ITD share technical information for the project and explain why alignments are eliminated. Some want smaller group meetings.
- All interviewees suggested using many different mechanisms to communicate ongoing information, for example local newspapers, newsletters, postcards and radio. Communication needs to be regular and frequent.
- The top issues interviewees want ITD to consider in this process are:
 - Safety
 - Environmental concerns
 - Public involvement
- Additional comments include the common concern over the “growth/no growth” factions of Moscow. The community is divided over whether a growing population is good for the city, and feel a widened highway would encourage growth.

**Thorncreek Road to Moscow
Highlights of Interview Responses**

What was your previous involvement with the Top of Lewiston Hill to Genesee and Genesee to Moscow project?

Summary:

- All interviewees were aware of the project and were fairly informed about its status. The majority of interviewees participated at some point in the projects and had the opportunity to give input.

Commonly heard themes and notable comments:

- Property owners had concerns and got involved
- Level of participation increased as the process continued
- District 2 engineer kept me and the Moscow Transportation Commission informed
- Attended open houses
- Aware of focus group meetings
- Member of the regional focus group and attended all meetings
- ITD attended a meeting hosted by the Latah Economic Development Council
- Reviewed all focus groups' possible alignments
- Commissioners were invited to participate in earlier focus groups
- Member of the Paradise Ridge Defense Coalition
- First contact with the project was when I saw helicopter markers in 1999

**Thorncreek Road to Moscow
Highlights of Interview Responses**

How did you get information on the project?

Summary:

- Almost everyone read about the project in the newspaper, and everybody said they received information about the project from some type of media outlet. A majority of people attended focus groups or public meetings to get informed about the project.

Commonly heard themes and notable comments:

- Newspaper
- Meetings
- Other media
- Word of mouth
- Direct mail
- Department directly
- Some say they learned of the decision because the process had begun on their property
- Internet, Moscow Vision 2020
- County commissioners received formal communication
- Flier, "Don't Pave Paradise"

**Thorncreek Road to Moscow
Highlights of Interview Responses**

What went well with the Idaho Transportation Department's previous public involvement efforts?

Summary:

- Overall interviewees knew about the process. Some of the interviewees felt it was fair. Most felt ITD succeeded by informing the majority of the community about the process and allowing them to give input.

Commonly heard themes and notable comments:

- There was some good interaction with the community
- People who did not like the decision criticized the process
- Focus group process worked well
- Engineers were available at public meetings to answer questions
- Felt the process went well – no complaints
- People who had different opinions faulted the process rather than the final decision
- Two to three ways to give public comment: verbal, written or Q & A to engineers
- Provided information via various media
- Close contact with legislators, county commissioners, mayor, city council and the Chamber of Commerce
- Buffet-style public meetings worked well. It's a great improvement to "you get three minutes to make your testimony"
- ITD was trying to work with the people; they did listen
- Good to move the meetings around; to hold them in Genesee and Moscow
- Typical of what has been done in the area for transportation planning
- Good selection of community members for focus group
- Convenient for an individual to get information from an ITD representative
- Happy with the process

**Thorncreek Road to Moscow
Highlights of Interview Responses**

What did not go so well?

Summary:

- Several interviewees felt the deck was stacked, and that the department had already made up its mind before involving the community. Interviewees felt as if the department was selective with citizens who were included in the focus group, and what information was released.

Commonly heard themes and notable comments:

- The project was basically decided before it was presented to the public
- There was a lot of misleading information including the angle of photos. This made one believe the route would go up and over Paradise Ridge, but this was not the case.
- The process was a problem. They did not know anything about the process until public meetings either in 1999 or 2000.
- There was no Web page
- Possibly presented too many alignments
- There was no local engineering firm
- Decisions were kept secret and underhanded
- The more I reviewed the process, the more it seemed like there was not a lot of public involvement
- It went from 11 to two alternatives with no understanding of why
- Seemed to pit community members against each other
- The environmental assessment study was not made easily available
- Engineers did not listen to property owners, nor did they understand the local environment
- Group of people felt they were not heard
- Very little communication with the public
- Not a high level of trust of the transportation department
- The nature of the academic community is not trusting

**Thorncreek Road to Moscow
Highlights of Interview Responses**

What would you like to see in our future public involvement efforts? How do you want to be involved in this project?

Summary:

- The majority of interviewees indicated a need for a higher level of public involvement and a heavy saturation of information. Most seemed adamant about having the entire community involved to make the process fair. Interviewees requested that ITD share technical information for the project and explain why alignments are eliminated. Some want smaller group meetings.

Commonly heard themes and notable comments:

- Talk to people who travel
- All segments of the community must be included
- Comprehensive issues of transportation (safety, bypass and ring roads) must be incorporated
- Use practicality and clarity
- Incorporate information into the monthly Chamber newsletter
- The same process. Too many people could make the decision-making process onerous – meetings too long, etc.
- Narrow down to three or four choices before you bring alignments to the public
- Clearly explain why certain alignments are eliminated
- Ongoing communication is a must
- It's important to bring ideas to the Moscow Transportation Commission
- Help people get ownership of their decision for the community to come to consensus on the best decision. This simply takes time.
- "Process is important." Due process, "fair" process is very important.
- All segments of the community must be included
- Comprehensive issues of transportation (safety, bypass and ring roads) must be incorporated
- Get ducks lined up that leadership and Fish & Game are brought into the process
- Web site is a good tool – Web-based information
- More of a discussion forum, use Moscow Vision 2020
- Bring Moscow Civic Association the Palouse Clearwater Environmental Institute and the Palouse Prairie Foundation into the discussion
- Meetings later in the evenings (7:30-8 p.m.)
- Series of workshop throughout the corridor, with Genesee and Moscow
- Have engineers explain the issues
- Latah County needs to be more involved
- Ask pros and cons of the alignments

- Explain that U.S. Highway 95 is changing
- Include women in the process; women are major users of the road system, yet don't participate in the public discussion
- There is a solution if done correctly

**Thorncreek Road to Moscow, Stage 1
Highlights of Interview Responses**

What is the best way to communicate with you and/or notify you of any upcoming activity?

Summary:

- All interviewees suggested using major media routes to communicate ongoing information. Communication needs to be regular and frequent.

Commonly heard themes and notable comments:

- Newspaper
- Mailings
- Internet
- Frequently visited places; community information presented at the Co-op
- Public radio
- Community gathering spots (i.e. farmers market and Friendship Square)
- Monthly Monday morning coffee sessions.
- Moscow Civic Association.
- Moscow Vision 2020
- Mail to city water customers
- Public Access channel
- Phone calls

**Thorncreek Road to Moscow, Stage 1
Highlights of Interview Responses**

What are the most important issues you would like the Idaho Transportation Department to consider in this process?

Summary:

- Everyone cited safety as an important issue that ITD should consider in this project. There was an equal concern for environmental issues.
 - Safety concerns – Steepness of the grade, straighten road, speed, truck traffic and weather
 - Environmental concerns – Protecting Palouse prairie, sensitive habitats (both animal and plant), pine forest and wetlands
 - Moscow Bypass Project – U.S. 95 entrance into Moscow affects location of possible bypass. Coordinate this project with bypass project.
 - Public involvement – Keeping people informed and involved in the project.
 - Economic – Importance of the road to the economy, affects the ability to ship products and transport workers.

Commonly heard themes and notable comments:

- Consider the cultural use of the prairie like the use by Indian tribes
- Keep in mind secondary and cumulative impacts to sensitive habitats
- Access: on/off corridors (also for local businesses)
- Growth/no growth
- Private property rights; people want to keep their privacy and natural environment. Don't displace people from their homes.
- Traffic congestion and volume (both now and projected)
- Visibility/view of houses on the knob
- Ensure the outcomes of the court ruling are accounted for
- Consider protecting and expanding recreational opportunities
- Balance the aesthetics with the road. How do you place the road so that it has the least impact?
- Cost
- Completion date, just get it done
- Consider hydrology issues
- Community assets like Paradise Ridge are important to the community
- Bypass to the west, if it goes east it will cut into the soul of Moscow

Thorncreek Road to Moscow
Highlights of Interview Responses

Other comments

Summary:

- Additional comments include the common concern of the “growth/no growth” factions of Moscow. The community is divided over whether a growing population is good for the city, and feel the widened highway would encourage growth.

Commonly heard themes and notable comments:

- Consider the Moscow Transportation Study
- The road is linked to the local economy
- Community has a different opinion of growth, so conduct a city survey
- Reach a community consensus because it’s agreed it’s a good thing
- Consider Moscow City’s Comprehensive Plan
- Need to look at the bigger picture – Moscow area needs a regional and comprehensive transportation plan
- New roads have impacts – it’s just a matter of how much. And one should consider the least amount of disruptions.
- Certain level of distrust of government. There is a need for a neutral third party to conduct outreach.
- Make the process as public as possible
- Appropriate coordination with land use
- Farmers are stewards of the land
- Safety with the least impact on the environment
- Must overcome the mentality of “not in my backyard”
- Highways 8 and 95 through town are not too efficient
- It appeared farmlands were favored over the Palouse Prairie
- I will fight the process if it goes through my land
- Keep the road a larger distance from the best farmland in the world